

# Saskatoon John G Diefenbaker Airport - History

- **Original 'Air Harbours'**

The first 'Air Harbour' in the Saskatoon area was a quarter section of land, which was set aside by the City in 1913, just west of the exhibition grounds. With the onset of WW I local aviation in the area ceased.

In 1919 Lt. Stan McClelland established an 'Air Harbour' on a field at 22<sup>nd</sup> ST West and Dundonald Avenue. He later developed another field two and one half miles north near the Hudson Bay Slough.

In 1922 Saskatoon is shown on the 'List of Air Harbours' as having two public-commercial air harbours. The Hudson Bay Slough site was used to train young Chinese from Canada, the United States and China for Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary Army. This site eventually became the location of today's airport.



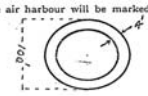
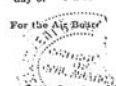
- **The First Airport**

In January 1927 the Department of National Defence, Civil Aviation Branch, asked Saskatoon to consider establishing an airport. The City, with DND assistance, chose a site in May 1928 which was recommended for development.

# 1929

The City acquired the land in July, and the site was licensed for day use on June 1, 1929. The air harbor, as it was referred to in those days, was significant inasmuch as it was the second licensed airfield in Saskatchewan. The air harbor covered a 65 hectare area. With a grant from the Department of National Defence, the City installed airport lighting in June 1930. The old airport site was then situated in the rural municipality of Cory and became part of the City on January 1, 1971.

**LICENSE FOR AIR HARBOUR**

THIS CERTIFIES THAT THE CITY OF SASKATOON  
whose address is SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN  
is hereby granted a license under the Air Regulations, 1920, and under the conditions specified overleaf  
for the use as a PUBLIC AIRPORT  
by DAY ONLY of the area described as follows:—  
"SOUTH EAST QUARTER OF SECTION 17, TOWNSHIP 37,  
RANGE 8, WEST OF THE 3rd MERIDIAN, CONTAINING 160 ACRES  
MORE OR LESS."  
during the months of ALL THE YEAR ROUND inclusive.  
The air harbour will be marked thus:  Circle, diameter outside 100', Band  
4', colour "Chrome yellow" or "White."  
This marker is to be placed in the centre  
of the landing area when total area is  
used.  
The following objects are to be marked with a "D"—  
  
This certificate is subject to the Air Regulations, 1920, and is valid while the conditions specified are  
complied with.  
Dated this 1st day of June 19 29  
For the Air Board,  
 J. G. Wakomaz,  
For Controller of Civil Aviation.

Saskatoon Airport was first developed in 1928 as the home of the Saskatoon Aero Club (later the Saskatoon Flying Club). The Aero Club operated the air harbor with financial grants from the city. Flight training began in May of 1928 when the club received a DeHavilland Moth from the federal government. By the end of 1929 the Saskatoon Aero Club was the second largest in the country with sixty members and 750 non-members.

September 30, 1930, two Saskatoon women, Nellie Carson and Grayce Hutchinson passed the tests for their private pilots' licenses, thus becoming the first women pilots in the province of Saskatchewan. June 8, 1930, Nellie Carson of Saskatoon set a record for altitude gained by a woman – in the neighborhood of 16,000 feet.

Nellie Carson (right),  
Grayce Hutchinson (left)  
PH 99-23.

Photo courtesy of Ray Crone, Regina.



In 1930 the first airmail service into the area was started by Western Canada Airways and linked all the major cities of Western Canada. Airmail services was discontinued on March 31, 1932, a casualty of the depression.

In January 1937 the City asked for a grant to improve the airport, but the Department of National Defence would give no assurances of help as the airport was not on the Trans-Canada Airway. Future expansion would depend on whether the Post Office would approve airmail service on a future Regina-Saskatoon route. Finally, a \$20,000 grant under the one-third cost-sharing scheme was approved in April 1938. The City constructed three runways during the summer of 1938 and some further work done in 1939.



About the same time the Saskatoon Flying Club entered into an agreement with the Department of National Defence to give primary flying training to provisional pilot officers of the RCAF. This contract continued until the beginning of the war when the club became part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) as No. 6 Elementary Flying Training School (EFTS) at Prince Albert. No. 6 EFTS was operated by the Northern Saskatchewan Flying Training School Ltd., a subsidiary of the Saskatoon Flying Club.

## • **Federal Government Takes Over**

### **1940**

In January 1940 the City agreed to lease the airport to the federal government for the duration of the war. It was taken over and operated by the RCAF until November 1945. Saskatoon Airport became the home of No. 4 Service Flight Training School (SFTS). Early in 1940 work started on five large hangars, barracks, classrooms, workshops, a hospital, and a control tower. No. 4 SFTS was a very busy school and two relief stations were operated to reduce traffic at Saskatoon, No. 1 at Vanscoy, and No. 2 at Osler, both in Saskatchewan. BCATP also operated two other detachments, No. 7 Initial Training School (ITS) which introduced the new recruits to air force life. No. 7 ITS began on December 8, 1941 and ceased operation on June 30, 1944. No. 20 Pre-Aircrew Education Detachment (PAED) operated for only one year, January 1, 1943 to September 15, 1944. No. 20 PAED upgraded recruit's education to meet standards for aircrew. BCATP operations at Saskatoon came to an end March 31, 1945.

### **1945**

While the war was drawing to a close, Saskatoon Airport continued to gain in stature. In 1944, Saskatoon Airport aeradio station was installed and commissioned in 1945. In November 1945 the Department of Transport took over maintenance of the airport from the RCAF. It was transferred to the Department of Transport on November 5, 1946. The City had refused to accept the airport at the end of the war, as provided for under the original agreement. The

airport then became a civil airport again. By 1948, with the advent of more and more sophisticated electronic equipment, instrument landing systems were installed on Runways 08 and 32.

The next year, 1949, was a significant one indeed. A control tower was opened and put into operation with electronic equipment borrowed from what was then the RCAF. This borrowed material was eventually replaced as the Department of Transport gained its own facilities and materials.



Trans-Canada Air Lines started scheduled passenger service to Saskatoon in July 1947 using DC-3 aircraft. This service inaugurated the first direct, daily, scheduled commercial passenger and mail service linking the Hub City (Saskatoon) with transcontinental flights between Toronto and Vancouver. Trans-Canada Air Lines introduced the larger more efficient North Star in 1950.

## 1950



In October 1950 the RCAF established a training station on the airport. On January 1, 1952, No. 1 Advanced Flying Training School (AFTS) started operations to train RCAF, RAF, and Atlantic Treaty air crews. By the end of 1952, permanent married quarters had been completed and station personnel moved in. RCAF Station Saskatoon, in addition to No. 1 AFTS, supported other RCAF units in the Saskatoon area, including No. 23 Wing Headquarters, No. 3043 Technical Training Unit (Auxiliary), and No. 4002 Medical Unit (Auxiliary).

Saskatoon moved into the combat field with the adoption of the famous B-25 Mitchell's of the 406 (Lynx) Auxiliary Squadron, Canada's first night-fighter unit based in England. In 1964 the auxiliary units were disbanded, and the regular force RCAF closed the entire station during the summer. Four hangars were handed over to the Department of Transport.



In 1955, Trans-Canada Air Lines introduced the four-engine Vickers Viscounts, and by 1967 the airline introduced jet travel to the community with the commencement of DC-9 service.

Due to an increase in air travel, Saskatoon discovered the need for improved air/ground communications as well as the improvement of electronic aids to navigation. By 1950, VHF air/ground communications was already in use and was shortly supplemented by the installation of UHF air/ground communications and combined VHF/UHF direction finding systems. The installation of a non-directional beacon at the airport in 1951 put Saskatoon on a par with the best equipped airports in Canada.

## 1955

The Department of Transport carried out major improvements to the airport including a new air terminal building, maintenance garage, taxi strips and parking area. The official opening of the new terminal complex took place in September 1955.



The airport became a Customs port of entry for tourists in September 1954. In October 1955 the City was again asked to take over the airport, but declined once more. The primary runway 09/27 was lengthened in 1954 and again in 1960. Runway 15/33 was rebuilt and lengthened in 1963.

More changes came about due to ever increasing air traffic. In 1958 the Saskatoon Airport became the first airport in Canada to have an air traffic terminal control unit. That same year, airways surveillance radar was installed and was later commissioned in 1959.

During the 1960's the Saskatoon Airport installed a VHF Omni Range (VOR) and Tactical Air Navigation (TACAN) as well as new instrument landing system equipment on runway 08 and 32 (now runway 09 and 33).

## 1972

April 1972 under contract from Transair, Norcanair took over Transair's Prince Albert – Saskatoon – Regina route, using Twin Otter CF-AIV. Norcanair eventually gained permanent authority for this route.

December 21, 1972, Saskatonians waited for Justice Minister Otto Lang to unveil the plans for a new airport facility. Included in the plans were a brand new terminal building to be twice the size of the existing terminal, aircraft parking areas to accommodate larger aircraft and more numerous flights. The grand opening of the airport took place on November 29, 1975. Former terminal building was renovated in 1977 to serve as the operations building.



In 1973 Norcanair, intent on building a north-south route system that connected with Air Canada at Saskatoon and Regina, bought the first of five Fairchild-built F-27Js from Hughes Air West.

In the late 1970's Saskatchewan Air Ambulance began service at the airport, as well there are two flying schools on the airport Mitchinson Flying Service Ltd. and Saskatoon Flying Service Ltd.

The early 1980's saw a general economic recession which caused air traffic activity to fall off, however an improved economy combined with aviation deregulation has recently spurred air traffic to new heights. The airport handled 625,000 passengers in 1988 and there were 113,148 aircraft movements.

In 1981 Norcanair ended its marginal Regina-Minot route. But Frontier Airlines of Denver stepped in quickly and on May 1 began operating Boeing 737s on a once-a-day route that started at Denver in late afternoon and went to Minot, then Regina and Saskatoon, where the crew and aircraft overnighted before returning to Denver the next morning.

October 1981 Norcanair's owners agreed to sell the firm's scheduled route licences and F-27 aircraft to the Saskatchewan government, which resulted in 1983 with Norcanair merging with Hi-Line Airways. Norcanair later acquired F-28 equipment and sought to become the feeder to CPAir until their merger with Pacific Western Airlines creating Canadian Airlines International Ltd. in March 1987. This resulted in Norcanair being sold to Time Air.

## 1990

June 23, 1993 the Government of Canada announced that three major airports would be named in honor of Canada's great historical leaders. The Saskatoon Airport was named the Saskatoon John G. Diefenbaker Airport. John George Diefenbaker was Canada's 13<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister, and was the first from the West.

In 1994 Runway 15-33 was rebuilt and was narrowed from 200 feet wide to 150 feet wide. Runway edge lighting was relocated to the new strip edge.

May 1995, with the signing of “Open Skies” air travel treaty between Canada and the United States, Northwest Airlines began two daily round-trip flights to Saskatoon, utilizing DC-9-30 aircraft initially.



In 1996 the airport underwent major renovations to the air terminal building, expanding to meet the growing needs of the airport carriers and users.

The Civil Air Navigation Services Commercialization Act, proclaimed in November, authorized the transfer of the ownership and management of Canadian air navigation services to a not-for-profit company, Nav Canada, November 1st, 1996.

In 1997 the centre 100 feet of Runway 09-27 was rehabilitated and overlaid with new pavement.

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- **DEVOLUTION**

## 1999

In the mid seventies, the Canadian Government began to review the management of major airports in Canada, a process that eventually led to the transformation of Canada's airports to local airport authorities. In the February 1994 budget the Government announced the National Airports Policy which commenced 01 April 1995

In 1994 the Saskatoon Airport Authority was incorporated under the Regional Airports Authorities Act. In late 1999, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Saskatoon Airport Authority and the Canadian Government and on 01 January 1999 the Saskatoon Airport Authority assumed responsibility for the Saskatoon John G. Diefenbaker International Airport.

- **THE SASKATOON AIRPORT AUTHORITY'S  
FIRST SEVEN YEARS**

During the first seven years of its stewardship, the Airport Authority has managed the airport through the most dramatic fall and then subsequent rapid growth in traffic in this airport's history. It has also been responsible for significant developments that have been necessary to meet the demands of this growth in traffic and to ensure that the airport is well placed to

accommodate future demand. This development has been guided by the Airport Master Plan, which was adopted in 1996.

A significant amount of industry change has occurred during the Airport Authority's initial stewardship which is just short of a decade.



Nav Canada that had just recently taken over the Air Navigation System in Canada constructed a new Air Traffic Control Tower which opened for operation in the fall of 2000.

## 2001

Low cost air carriers in the Canadian market stimulated the demand for domestic service. Westjet commenced service into Saskatoon in 1999 and has increased their market share every year since. During the earlier part of the decade, Air Canada continued to re-organize after the Canadian Airlines merger. Canadian Regional was merged into Air Canada Jazz

In January of 2001, The Saskatoon Airport Authority embarked on a complete restoration and expansion of the old terminal building. The project had three phases and was scheduled over twenty months.



The tragic events of September 11, 2001 had an immediate impact on the airport, causing an immediate and significant fall in passenger traffic. Since that time, amidst further industry restructuring, demand for air service is slowly but steadily rebounded with traffic volumes reaching pre-September 11 levels late 2004.

The prospects for further strong growth in the future are healthy.

In October of 2002, the Saskatoon Airport Authority opened the expanded and renovated Terminal Building. This completed a \$17.6 million project which virtually doubled the public space in the building. Two additional aircraft loading bridges were added in the project increasing the SAA's level of service to the airlines and the traveling public.



On June 1st, 2004 the Saskatoon John G. Diefenbaker International Airport celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary



## 2005



### HOLD BAGGAGE SCREENING

In January of 2005, the Saskatoon Airport Authority entered into an agreement with the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA) to implement an in-line system for the 100% screening of all hold baggage destined on domestic



and international flights. This project also included the realignment and expansion of the airline ticket counters in the main terminal concourse. Ticket counters were expanded to 32 positions giving the airport room for additional airline expansion and the handling of the seasonal charter program. This project was completed in December of 2005 and the Hold Baggage Screening equipment was commissioned and fully operational in January of 2006.

Also in 2005, the Saskatoon Airport Authority added on additional Aircraft Loading Bridge specifically designed to accommodate Regional Jets. This brought the total to five bridges being available to aircraft at Saskatoon John G. Diefenbaker Airport.

## ● **CURRENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**

Since taking over operations 7 years ago, the Airport Authority has invested over \$37 million in construction, restoration and expansion projects. In the future, additional effort and funding will be required in order to meet the on-going demands for airport infrastructure at the Saskatoon J.G. Diefenbaker International Airport.

2005 saw a significant increase in traffic volumes of 12.3% from the previous year. Pre-September 11 levels were surpassed with a record breaking year of over 902,000 E D passengers.

Following adoption of the 1996 Master Plan by the Saskatoon Airport Authority's Board of Directors, a multi-year Capital Program Plan was formulated. The Airport Authority is reaching the final stages of this plan.

The major developments that have been implemented since 1999 include the following:

- 1999 – The SAA completed an Apron 1 restoration by replacing approximately 1/3 of the concrete pads on the apron.
- 2000 - Nav Canada opened a new state of the art Air Traffic Control Tower.
- 2002 - The SAA completed the renovation & expansion of the Air Terminal Building
- 2005 - The SAA relocated and expanded the Airline Ticket Counters in the main terminal concourse.
- 2005 – The SAA installed an in-line, back of house Hold Baggage Screening system.

The SAA has also completed numerous other capital projects which include:

- Capital fleet replacement
- Terminal building enhancements.
- Ramp and Taxiway restorations

